

# Tasmania's Dive Trail

Your guide to diving Tasmania's east coast

*'Every dive in Tasmania displays an exquisite combination of lyrical beauty and the wistfully bizarre.'*

David Doubilet, *National Geographic Magazine*.



Tasman Peninsula; *Macrocystis pyrifera* (giant kelp); Zooanthids on cave wall

## Tasmania – a great place to dive

The spectacular coastline and clear, pristine waters have all the ingredients for a superb diving destination. With hundreds of dive sites along 5,400 kilometres of coastline, Tasmania offers a variety of experiences for beginners and advanced divers.

***Diving in Tasmania is a truly unique experience and one that you'll never forget.***

From amazing giant kelp forests and sponge gardens to spectacular caves and wrecks, Tasmania's Dive Trail has been developed to showcase some of the very best dive sites on the more accessible east coast and to provide some of the information you need to plan a diving adventure.

If you're not a diver already, Tasmania is a great place to take the plunge and learn. Contact a dive operator listed in this brochure for details on how you can start to enjoy the marine environment from a different perspective!

*To find out more about diving elsewhere in Tasmania or to explore the shipwrecks of King Island, talk to a Tasmanian dive operator.*



## Incredible marine life

*Tasmania's clear oceanic waters contain some of the most biologically diverse marine environments in the world. Among the multitude of things you will see are some very well-known species...*

### Giant kelp forests

Easily accessible off the south coast are Australia's most extensive giant kelp forests, providing habitat for marine species such as the big bellied seahorse, weedy seadragon and cuttlefish. Like trees in a forest, giant kelp plants provide shelter and habitat for an enormous number of marine creatures.

### Seahorses, seadragons, pipefish and pipehorses

Most people are fascinated by seahorses, seadragons, pipefish and pipehorses (fishes with characteristics of both seahorses and seadragons). Together they make up the fish family, Syngnathidae.

The most unusual aspect of Syngnathidae biology has to be reproduction. Unique in the animal kingdom, male Syngnathidae become pregnant. Eggs are transferred from the female to the male, where they are fertilised and brooded for up to six weeks.

Seadragons and seahorses can be found together but often seadragons live in deeper and/or more exposed locations. They are usually spotted on the edge of kelp beds where most of their food (mysid shrimp) is found.



Cowfish

Pipefish and pipehorses occur in sheltered seagrass areas. Good places to see seadragons include Waubs Bay (Bicheno) and Waterfall Bay (Tasman Peninsula).

### Diving with dragons

Seadragons and other Syngnathidae attract a lot of attention, which is not necessarily welcome. To reduce your impact on these marvellous animals:

- look but don't touch;
- leave them where they are;
- do not herd them from their 'home range';
- do not move them up and down the water column;
- take special care with egg-carrying males; and
- turn lights down – keep flashes to 3-4 per encounter.

### Handfish

These small, unusual, slow-moving fish prefer to 'walk' on their pectoral and pelvic fins rather than swim. The pectoral or side fins are leg-like, with their extremities resembling a human hand. Five of the eight currently identified species are endemic to Tasmania and Bass Strait. They are generally found on sandy sediments. Spotted handfish, once common in their range, are now a threatened species, possibly because their habitat is being destroyed by the introduced Northern Pacific Seastar.



Red handfish

### Cuttlefish

The giant Australian cuttlefish is one of the largest cuttlefish species in the world, reaching up to 60cm. Cuttlefish swim by propelling themselves backwards or by hovering, gently moving their fins. They can also change their buoyancy and move up or down in the water column.

Cuttlefish can camouflage themselves to hide from predators and to ambush prey. This camouflage can be seen in the changing of colours and patterns, caused by a layer of tiny elastic pigment sacs found just under the skin.

They are spectacular creatures to see while diving. Cuttlefish in Tasmania may be found in caves and around rocky reef areas, in seagrass and in kelp forests.

### Dolphins, whales and seals

Both the common and bottle-nosed dolphin are frequently seen along the coast. These beautiful creatures often swim alongside boats and provide spectacular displays of acrobatics for locals and visitors alike.

Baleen whales, southern right whales and humpback whales can be seen at east coast vantage points, such as Frederick Henry Bay and Great Oyster Bay, during their annual migration.

While most species migrate some distance off the continental shelf, humpback and southern right whales come sufficiently close to the coast to allow regular sightings from May to July.

Divers should note that whales are massive animals and despite their calm demeanour when resting in a bay, they can become quite aggressive if they feel threatened. For these reasons it can be risky to be in the water with them.

Dive boats should stay 100m away. In some instances, authorities may have applied temporary exclusion zones around whales due to their threatened species status, so be aware of any special regulations.

Bottlenose dolphin



to help researchers  
learn more about whales,  
please report all sightings to the  
Whale Hotline:  
0427 WHALES or 0427 942 537

The Australian fur seal is one of the largest seals in the world. It is the most common seal in Tasmanian waters, hauling out at various rocky areas around the coastline.

To observe seals safely:

- approach quietly and slowly;
- keep boats over 100m away from seals during pupping season (Nov-Jan) and 50m away at other times; and
- never land at a seal colony – going too close or landing can cause a stampede, putting pups in danger.



Australian fur seal

### Invertebrates

Thousands of marine invertebrates are found in Tasmanian waters.

Invertebrate animals, particularly sessile organisms such as sponges, ascidians, bryozoans, hydroids and soft corals, are key features of most Tasmanian reefs. Large species of crustacea, such as the southern rock lobster, hide in nooks and crannies all along the Tasmanian coastline. Molluscs, such as abalone, oysters, scallops and seaslugs (seahares and nudibranchs) are also common – incredibly there are more than 500 recorded species of seaslugs. Echinoderms (seastars, seurchins, featherstars and seacucumbers etc.) are also an important faunal element of Tasmanian waters.



Southern nudibranch

## Marine protected areas on the east coast

### Marine reserves

Marine reserves are legally managed areas of sea dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, natural and cultural resources. Currently six marine reserves around Tasmania (not including Macquarie Island Marine Nature Reserve), cover an area of more than 45,000ha, and formally conserve and protect a range of marine ecosystems, habitats and species.

The following four marine reserves are easily accessible on the east coast. To care for these reserves, try to avoid anchoring boats and please follow the motto, **'Don't Rubbish Our Sea.'**

**Tinderbox Marine Nature Reserve** offers visitors of all ages a safe introduction to snorkelling in the underwater world.

**Ninepin Point Marine Nature Reserve** protects an unusual underwater world where light is cut off by tannin-stained water and deep water creatures survive in the shallows.

**Maria Island Marine National Park** showcases a spectacular array of fish, kelp and colourful invertebrates.

**Governor Island Marine Nature Reserve** offers magnificent sponge gardens, caves and shallow reefs.

The Australian Government has also declared a number of Marine Protected Areas in Commonwealth waters between 3nm and 200nm off the Tasmanian coastline. To learn more about these go to: [www.deh.gov.au/coasts/mpa/index.html](http://www.deh.gov.au/coasts/mpa/index.html)

*Southern right whale and calf*



*Southern rock lobster*

### Marine pests

Marine pests are creatures that are not native to our marine environment. These animals and plants range from microscopic dinoflagellates through to large species such as shells and starfish. Marine pests have the potential to seriously affect habitats, food chains, the ecosystem, marine industries and our enjoyment of the marine environment.

#### The solution... prevention is better than cure

You can help by making sure marine pests don't hitch a ride with you by washing and drying dive gear well away from dive sites.

### Sustainable recreational fishing

#### Rock lobster and abalone

Two species of abalone are commonly found around Tasmania – the blacklip abalone and the greenlip abalone. Abalone grow to a length of 20cm and are found on exposed reefs from zero to 40m.

The southern rock lobster and the eastern rock lobster (or crayfish) are both found in Tasmanian waters. Lobster grow to more than 22cm in carapace length and more than 5kg and are found on rocky reefs from zero to 200m.

Both the abalone and rock lobster fisheries (and others) are safeguarded by State Government Management Plans that recognise recreational and commercial access and ensure ecological and economical sustainability. Bag and possession limits apply as well as seasonal and area restrictions.

You can buy a recreational dive or fishing licence on-line at <https://recfishing.dpiw.tas.gov.au> or at a Service Tasmania shop, ph 1300 135 513.

## Low impact diving

To ensure the future of Tasmania's marine environment, observe the following low impact diving guidelines:

### Observe – don't disturb

Don't touch, disturb or remove plants and animals.

### Watch your feet

Turbulence from divers' fins may disturb marine life.

### Take care of future generations

Egg-carrying animals are generally slower and easily stressed.

### Turn lights down

Don't expose animals to bright light over an extended period, especially at night.

### Tread carefully and clean up

Be careful of vegetation and shorebird habitats while accessing the water. Stick to tracks and walk on wet sand where possible. Take any rubbish home with you – don't dump it into the sea.

### Dive correctly

Dive gear should be rigged and operated to prevent damage to habitats. Dangling gauges and equipment should be secured. Divers should maintain neutral buoyancy to minimise disturbance to the seafloor by fins. They should also avoid gripping objects for support or to prevent drift.

*Giant cuttlefish*





Australian fur seal

Hermit crab

## Get the OK before you go!

Environmental protection and conservation regulations change as new information about caring for our complex marine environment emerges. If you are unsure about whether you need permission to dive at a particular location, contact the local Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service office for information.

## What is the weather like?

For up-to-date weather forecasts call:

Tasmania State, Cities and Districts Forecast Service 1900 955 364  
 Tasmania Boating Weather Service 1900 969 940  
 Tasmania Coastal, Land Weather and Flood Warnings 1300 659 216  
 or visit [www.bom.gov.au/weather/tas](http://www.bom.gov.au/weather/tas)

Telephone weather services call charge: 1900 numbers: 77c per minute incl. GST; 1300 numbers: low call cost, around 27.5c incl. GST (more from international satellite, mobile or public phones).

Red gurnard perch

Exploring a wreck



## Tasmanian Dive Operators

### ★ Aqua Scuba Diving Services

271 Elizabeth St Hobart  
 03 6234 5658  
[www.aqua-scuba.com.au](http://www.aqua-scuba.com.au)

### ★ Bay of Fires Dive

291 Gardens Rd Binalong Bay  
 03 6376 8335  
[www.bayoffiresdive.com.au](http://www.bayoffiresdive.com.au)

### ★ Eaglehawk Dive Centre

178 Pirates Bay Drive  
 Eaglehawk Neck  
 03 6250 3566  
[www.eaglehawkdive.com.au](http://www.eaglehawkdive.com.au)

### ★ East Coast Scuba Centre

124 Binalong Bay Rd St Helens  
 03 6376 8368  
[www.divetasmania.com](http://www.divetasmania.com)

### ★ Flinders Island Dive

22 Wireless Station Rd Emita  
 03 6359 8429  
[www.divetasmania.com](http://www.divetasmania.com)

### ★ Seal and Sea Adventure Tours

03 6382 3452  
[www.sealandsea.com](http://www.sealandsea.com)

### ★ Members of Dive Tasmania

### ★ The Underwater Centre

**Tasmania Pty Ltd**  
 200 Flinders St Beauty Point  
 03 6383 4844  
[www.underwaterctr.com.au](http://www.underwaterctr.com.au)

### ★ Underwater Adventures

0417 015 654  
[www.underwateradventures.com.au](http://www.underwateradventures.com.au)

### **Bicheno Dive Centre**

2 Scuba Court Bicheno  
 03 6375 1138  
[www.bichenodive.com.au](http://www.bichenodive.com.au)

### **Go Dive**

190 Argyle Street Hobart 7000  
 03 6231 9749  
[www.godivetassie.com](http://www.godivetassie.com)

### **Scuba Centre**

62 Old Bass Hwy Wynyard  
 03 6442 2247  
[www.scubacentre.net.au](http://www.scubacentre.net.au)

### **The Dive Shop**

67a Argyle St Hobart  
 03 6234 3428  
[www.thediveshophobart.tk](http://www.thediveshophobart.tk)

A giant kelp forest



This brochure has been jointly developed by the Australian Government Department of the Environment and Heritage, Tourism Tasmania and Dive Tasmania, in response to an action in the South-east Regional Marine Plan. The aim is to support sustainable marine-based industries and to improve knowledge and awareness of the Tasmanian marine environment and oceans management.

While every effort has been made to ensure that the information contained in this brochure is correct, we cannot be responsible for errors or omissions. Divers should confirm site information prior to diving.

Please note that diving conditions in Tasmania can change rapidly, with varying weather, tides and other factors. Divers should check local conditions prior to diving, or consult a local operator.

*Remember...* local knowledge is invaluable.

For more information on Tasmania's Dive Trail visit [www.divetasmania.com.au](http://www.divetasmania.com.au)

For more information on visiting Tasmania visit [www.discovertasmania.com](http://www.discovertasmania.com)

For more information on Australia's Oceans Policy and Regional Marine Planning visit [www.deh.gov.au/md](http://www.deh.gov.au/md)



Acknowledgments: Dr Keith Martin-Smith – Project Seahorse, Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment, Tourism Tasmania, Department of the Environment and Heritage – National Oceans Office, Dive Tasmania.

Photographic acknowledgments: Tourism Tasmania. © All rights reserved. Joe Shemesh (Cape Pillar). All other photographs supplied by Jon Bryan.

Front cover: Diving in a sponge garden; Southern biscuit star; Big bellied seahorse in giant kelp; Jewel anemone